

## Inquiry-based Teaching

Activity A: To identify characteristics of effective inquiry teaching.

Directions – Considering the discussion we just completed on Bank’s Approach to Teaching Inquiry in the Social Studies (see resources) and what you know and believe about inquiry teaching, work with one or two colleagues and brainstorm characteristics of effective inquiry teaching. For example:

- What are the teachers doing during these lessons?
- What are the students doing during these lessons?
- What statements can you make about the lessons?

Ask one person in your pair or group to record your ideas on a large sheet of newsprint.

You will have 20 minutes of brainstorming time, and then will be asked to share your ideas with the whole group.

Activity B: To create an inquiry-based lesson from an existing lesson plan.

Directions – Working briefly (five minutes) by yourself, identify a lesson you have taught which you would like to modify to an inquiry-based lesson. Identify:

- Your goal(s) for the lesson
- The content you want students to learn.
- The strategy or method you used to teach this lesson.
- How you assessed student learning.

Form a group with two or three other colleagues. Working with you colleagues, consider each person’s lesson one at a time and discuss how each lesson could be modified to become an inquiry lesson for classroom use. As your group modifies each lesson, refer to the posted brainstorming lists and the “Characteristics of Effective Inquiry Lessons” (see below) list to assist you in identifying:

- What question, issue, or problem the students will be considering.
- What the students will be doing.
- What the teacher will be doing.
- What materials and/or resources will be needed.

Select one or two of your group’s best ideas for a new inquiry lesson. Describe these lesson ideas to the whole group by responding to the dot points above.

## **Characteristics of Effective Inquiry Lessons**

### **Social studies inquiry lessons:**

- are student centered.
- provide opportunities for students to formulate questions about key historical or current issues, investigate and critically evaluate perspectives and positions using primary sources and documents, and/or gather and weigh evidence from various sources in order to make informed decisions about historical or current events.
- are usually based on a question which students work to answer, a problem which students solve, or a decision which students make.
- usually involve a variety of alternative answers/solutions/decisions that are considered, evaluated, and discussed.
- often simulate real life problems or decision making situations.
- are often characterized by group work, cooperation, and/or sharing of information.
- involve issues that are interesting and/or provocative to students and both pique their curiosity and sustain a high level of interest throughout the activity.
- often deal with an issue or problem that has no one right answer.
- are characterized by an atmosphere of openness where students feel comfortable expressing opinions and/or presenting alternative answers/solutions/decisions.
- result in students learning both social studies skills and content.

### **During social studies inquiry lessons, students:**

- search out and discover knowledge for themselves.
- learn critical thinking skills which can be applied to different issues, questions, or problems in another context.
- collect and analyze evidence, then use this evidence to evaluate hypotheses or positions.
- question other students' positions asking for justifications for those positions.
- research, examine resources, develop and test their own hypotheses, and/or clarify and present their opinions, decisions, or conclusions.
- use and/or learn critical thinking skills such as determining the reliability of a historical source, determining the factual accuracy of a statement, distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information, or determining the validity of an argument.
- are encouraged to make their own interpretations, make generalizations, and/or draw conclusions.

### **During social studies inquiry lessons, the teacher and the students jointly explore aspects of the question/problem/decision.**

### **During social studies inquiry lessons, the teacher:**

- encourages students to identify issues, state hypotheses, and then clarify, probe, and resolve conflicting ideas and positions.
- asks the students to clarify terms and to support their positions with reasons and examples.
- helps students identify materials and sources of information that may help them to answer key questions.
- encourages the students to consider alternatives and gather sufficient evidence upon which to make a decision.
- encourages both a respect for individual students and tolerance for a variety of opinions, ideas, solutions, and/or decisions.
- creates a classroom atmosphere where students are comfortable stating and supporting their ideas and respectfully questioning the ideas of others.